

IMPROVED RF/MICROWAVE STRIPLINE STRUCTURES AND METHOD FOR FABRICATING SAME

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of radio frequency(RF)/microwave stripline structures, and more particularly to an improved RF filter and method for fabricating the same.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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RF filters are well known in the art and are widely used for controlling and enhancing the performance of communications systems. A variety of conventional RF filters have been designed for such purposes. One common type of conventional RF filter is a stripline filter comprised of a housing and transmission lines housed therein which are both machined from a metal block by milling equipment.

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Such conventional RF filters suffer from several drawbacks. First, the machined filter is both heavy and bulky, as well as expensive to manufacture. Second, the formed transmission lines must be relatively thick to resist being bowed during the machining process. This thickness results in high signal loss. Third, machined parts are often mechanically misaligned when formed which can adversely effect both filter performance, as well as the yield of acceptable devices attained from a fabrication run. Fourth, the fabrication process is slow and labor intensive. Finally, the ground planes and fastening and support structures must be relatively thick to support the transmission lines, all of

which add to the weight, size and expense of the filter.

To overcome the foregoing drawback associated with transmission lines formed from metal plates, other conventional RF filters use printed wiring boards (PWB) to form the transmission lines. Such filters, however, still use a relatively thick machine formed housing, resulting in a filter which is still relatively heavy, bulky and expensive.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide an improved RF filter that is relatively lightweight, small in size and inexpensive to manufacture. Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved RF filter that can be fabricated in an efficient and cost-effective manner resulting in high fabrication yields. It is a further object of the present invention to provide an improved method for fabricating such an RF filter.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An improved RF/microwave stripline structure and method for fabricating the same, wherein the stripline structure housing is fabricated from formed sheet metal rather than machined metal and the RF/microwave transmission lines are fabricated on a PWB. The use of formed sheet metal reduces the time required to fabricate the filter and results in a filter that is lighter, smaller and less expensive than conventional filters. Use of the PWB eliminates alignment problems because critical dimensions are controlled by the PWB artwork instead of mechanical parts.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIG. 1 shows exterior perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of an inverted, improved RF filter according to the present invention.

FIG. 2 shows a top view of the exterior of the top cover of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 shows a top view of the interior of the bottom cover of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 shows a cross sectional view of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 shows a detailed section of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 shows a primary PWB for a cross coupled filter in accordance with the exemplary embodiment of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 7 shows a primary PWB for a non-cross coupled filter in accordance with the exemplary embodiment of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 8 shows a secondary PWB for a cross coupled filter in accordance with the exemplary embodiment of the improved RF filter shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 9 shows a secondary PWB mount for the secondary PWB shown in FIG 8.

FIG. 10 shows the secondary PWB shown in FIG. 8 mounted in the secondary PWB mount shown in FIG. 9.

FIG. 11 shows the top layer of a third PWB for an alternative exemplary embodiment of an improved RF filter according to the present invention.

FIG. 12 shows the bottom layer of the third PWB shown in FIG. 11.

FIG. 13 shows the top cover for an enclosure housing the PWB shown in FIGS. 11 and 12.

FIG. 14 shows the bottom cover for an enclosure housing the PWB shown in FIGS. 11 and 12.

FIG. 15 shows an alternative embodiment of an improved RF filter according to the present invention in which the filter is mounted onto a chassis and only includes a top sheet metal cover.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The following detailed description relates to an improved RF filter and a method for fabricating the same. Although the filter housing described herein is fabricated from formed sheet metal, filters fabricated from other types of materials can benefit from the use of the inventive methods and structures described herein and are considered to be within the teachings of the present invention.

FIG. 1 shows an exterior perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of an inverted, improved RF filter 10 according to the present invention. Filter 10 includes top cover 12 and bottom cover 14 which together define a cavity 16 in which the filter components are housed. FIG. 2 shows a top view of the exterior of top cover 12, and FIG. 3 shows a top view of the interior of bottom cover 14.

Top cover 12 and bottom cover 14 are fabricated from sheets of metal formed into any desired shape by bending, drawing, etching and forming, or stamping. As shown in FIG. 2, top cover 12 includes four protruding flanges 24 formed by outwardly folding the sheet metal sides of the top cover 12. Similarly, as shown in FIG. 3, bottom cover 14 includes four likewise formed flanges 28 protruding outwardly from bottom cover 14. Top cover 12 and bottom cover 14 may be plated, for example with silver, to decrease the signal loss of filter 10, as well as to increase the resistance of filter 10 to environmental and/or electromagnetic effects.

FIG. 4 shows a cross-sectional view of filter 10. Filter 10 includes a conventional PWB 18 which is horizontally positioned across the cavity 16 between the top cover flanges 24 and the bottom cover flanges 28. PWB 18 extends outwards past the edges of top cover and bottom cover flanges 24 and 28. The PWB 18 is coupled to the flanges 24 and 28 by a conventional fastener, such as rivets, or is alternatively bonded to the flanges 24 and 28 by epoxy, solder, welding, or a combination of the same. FIG. 5 shows an enlarged view of detail A-A of FIG. 4. It should be understood that the improved RF filter housed in the enclosure formed by top and bottom covers 12 and 14 according to the present invention need not be fabricated using a PWB. The PWB can be replaced by either sheet metal or machined metal onto which the circuit is formed. However, using sheet metal or machined metal in lieu of a PWB will negate the tolerance control benefits derived from using a PWB.

In an alternative embodiment of filter 10 not shown, the top and bottom covers 12 and 14 can be fabricated without folding the sheet metal into the protruding flanges 24 and 28. Rather, the top and bottom covers 12 and 14 can be coupled to the PWB 18 by means of alignment pegs that are partially inserted through the PWB 18. This is how sheet metal shields, such as the enclosure formed by top and bottom covers 12 and 14, are typically installed on a PWB.

FIG. 6 shows a PWB 18 used for a cross coupled filter, and FIG. 7 shows a PWB 18' used for a non-cross coupled filter. Transmission lines 42 of conductive material are formed on both PWB 18 and PWB 18' using conventional fabrication techniques such as photolithography, etc. PWB 18 has a top layer and a bottom layer and has an identical artwork pattern formed on both its top and bottom layers. Similarly, PWB 18' also has a top layer and a bottom layer and has an identical non-cross coupled artwork pattern formed on both its top and bottom layers. A series of plated through holes 44 enable the artwork patterns on both layers of the PWBs 18 and 18', respectively, to be electrically coupled. PWBs 18 and 18' can alternatively be fabricated to have more than two layers. Also, the artwork of the cross coupled and non-cross coupled circuits does not have to be formed on both layers of the PWBs 18 and 18', respectively. However, doing so reduces the signal loss of filter 10.

As shown in FIGS. 1 and 4, bottom cover 14 includes a pair of RF connectors 20 and 22 which protrude through holes 30 and 32 shown in FIG. 3. The RF connectors 20 and 24 are soldered to the PWB 18 at two of the plated through holes 44, and are bonded

to the bottom cover 14 using epoxy, solder or welding. Alternatively, the RF connectors 20 and 24 can be coupled to the PWB 18 and the bottom cover 14 by means surface mount or through hole connectors mounted directly on the PWB 18. In addition, the RF connectors 20 and 24 can be coupled through any side of filter 10.

As shown in FIGS. 5, 6 and 7, filter 10 includes critical gaps 40 formed between rods 41 on the PWB 18, which gaps 40 act as capacitances for controlling the filter 10. Conventional filters having transmission lines fabricated from machined elements sometimes have difficulty achieving and maintaining critical tolerances, such as the dimensions of the critical gap 40, due to the bowing and misalignment of mechanically formed parts.

By employing the fabrication method of the present invention, critical tolerances such as the dimensions of the critical gap 40 can be easily controlled by the PWB artwork, instead of being dependent upon the correct alignment of mechanical parts. Consequently, this permits the sheet metal components of filter 10 to have larger tolerances such that any misalignment of filter components, as is shown for example in FIG. 5, will not adversely effect the performance of filter 10.

The present invention provides a simplified method for fabricating a non-cross coupled RF filter. First, the top and bottom covers 12 and 14 are formed from sheet metal. Then, PWB 18 is placed on the bottom cover flanges 28 and held in place while the RF connectors 20 and 22 are inserted through holes 30 and 32 and bonded to the bottom cover 14 and soldered to the through holes 44 of PWB 18. The top cover 12 is then

placed over the PWB 18 and top cover flanges 24 and bottom cover flanges 28 are coupled to the PWB 18 and to each other by epoxy, solder, or welds.

The present invention also provides a simplified method for fabricating a cross coupled RF filter in which a secondary PWB 34, shown in FIG. 8, and having a single transmission line 42 is positioned apart from and parallel to the primary PWB 18' in the enclosure formed by top cover 12 and bottom cover 14. Specifically, secondary PWB 34 is coupled by means of solder or epoxy to a secondary PWB mount 36 shown in FIG. 9 to form an assembly which is coupled to the interior of the top cover 12. The secondary PWB 34 is used for ease of fabricating the cross coupled RF filter. The circuitry formed on secondary PWB 34 can alternatively be formed on sheet metal or machined metal. However, using sheet metal or machined metal in lieu of a PWB will negate the tolerance control benefits derived from using a PWB.

Secondary PWB mount 36 is fabricated from sheet metal in the same manner as the top and bottom covers 12 and 14, and includes a plurality of flanges 38 configured for insertion into openings 26 formed in top cover 12 and shown in FIG. 2. The assembly of secondary PWB 34 and secondary PWB mount 36, shown in FIG. 10, is coupled to the interior of the top cover 12 by inserting the flanges 38 into the openings 26. The flanges 38 are then grounded together using epoxy, rivets, solder or welds. The secondary PWB 34 and secondary PWB mount 36 are not included in non-cross coupled filters, nor does top cover 12 need to include openings 26 for such filters.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention not shown, a cross coupled filter can be fabricated by modifying the artwork formed on PWB 18' to include cross coupling elements. In another alternative embodiment of the present invention, a cross coupled filter can be fabricated using a single PWB 48 having a top layer 50 and a bottom layer 54, shown in FIGS. 11 and 12, respectively, which is housed in an enclosure formed by top cover 56 and bottom cover 60, shown in FIGS. 13 and 14, respectively. The cross coupling elements are printed on PWB 48, with the artwork pattern formed on top layer 50 being different from that formed on bottom layer 54. Cross coupling is achieved by routing element 52 shown in FIG. 11 through small openings 58 shown in FIG. 13 and then coupling to the cross coupling point via artwork, discrete components or wiring. In yet another alternative embodiment not shown, a cross coupled filter can be fabricated using a multi-layer PWB by using the routing on the inner layers of the PWB. All three of the alternative embodiments of a cross coupled filter just described eliminate the need for a secondary PWB. It should also be noted that since it is the artwork formed on a PWB that determines the circuit's operational capabilities, cross coupling can be achieved by PWBs having either identical or differing artwork on its respective layers.

FIG. 15 shows still another alternative embodiment of the RF filter 10 of the present invention in which PWB 18 rests on a chassis 62, such as a heat sink, enclosed only by top cover 12. This embodiment of filter 10 need not include a bottom cover since the chassis serves to protect and thus maintain the structural integrity of the filter 10 in the same manner as would a bottom cover.

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The RF filter of the present invention provides a lightweight, small size and inexpensive filter having many applications. The filter can be used for commercial or military applications, and can be used for high power, e.g. 1 kW, or low power, e.g. 1pW, applications. The filter can also operate over a broad frequency range, e.g. from 100 MHz
5 to approximately 50 GHz. The filter can also be used with multiple port structures such as diplexors, n-way combiners or splitters, and hybrid combiners and splitters. The filter can also be a delay line operating, for example, in a combline or interdigital filter and having a 2millisecond delay at 2GHz. The delay line can be implemented with or without cross coupling.

10 Numerous modifications to and alternative embodiments of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art in view of the foregoing description. Accordingly, this description is to be construed as illustrative only and is for the purpose of teaching those skilled in the art the best mode of carrying out the invention. Details of the structure may be varied substantially without departing from the spirit of the invention
15 and the exclusive use of all the modifications which come within the scope of the appended claims is reserved.